Shanghai July 3d 1852

To the Com. on
For. Miss. Soc of Inquiry
Princ Theol Sem

Dear Brethren

A letter from the Cor. Sec of your Com. dated last Jan was rec'd a few weeks ago. I answer it now as I hear of a vessel sailing in a day or two for California. We hope that this will soon become the usual mail route as it will bring us much nearer home. When the facilities of navigation are increased the amount of emigration from China will also increase. & the Rom & Pr. mission work thus become more united. The emigration thus far has been mostly from the Southern parts who have always heretofore been the most disposed to emigrate. & have formed the principal part of the Chinese population at Singapore Bangkok & other places especially on the East India islands.

In looking over your letter I find information requested on two points 1st The progress of Romanism & 2d The objections made by the chinese to our religion. With regard to the first we have no reliable & statistical information to go on. And in fact come but little in contact with the system. The Romanists are able to operate in the interior where we do not hear nothing of them. Their also their priests drop in Chinese style & when I meet them wh I occasionly do, our conversation is always in Chinese. I met one the other day preaching as we would in the street & at the time I came up talking about the creation. Sometimes a man who has been under their instruction comes into our chapels. one man remarked to me after I had finished talking, your preaching is the same with the Roman Catholics. This may have arisen from his ignorance confusing those things wh are spiritually different because of some slight resemblance. just as the Chinese often tell us our systems are like theirs. or there may have been what I should really be glad to find the case a real similarity. If the Romish priests do much preaching wh I suspect is genrally not the case they would be compelled to say something about their system & how it differs from the idolatry around. They must also set forth the superiority

of the christian system – what it reveals of the character of our true God. & of Jesus Xt whom he hath sent. I asked a chinaman who heard them if these were the things they taught. he said yes & said emphatically that they spoke of christ alone as being able to save from sin. The only difference he noticed was that I did not & repeat prayers as they did. another time a man came in & interupting me said you are talking about Jesus & may & wanted to know if I had any pictures. according to his representation Romanism had more of may than Xt, more of the human, than the divine. Within a few ~~steps~~ minutes walk of my present residence is a large Romish Cathedral. It has been 4 or 5 years in building & is yet incomplete. It is one 200 ft long & over 100 wide & by far the largest & most imposing building in Shanghai. It is well situated & will no doubt when complete attract many of this people who are easily influenced by outward pomp & show. occasional accounts of Romish misdeeds come to our ears. The keeper of one of their chapels at Woosung – a city down the river where the Spirin ships are anchored was brought up before the British Consul in ~~ct~~ & it appeared that he kept a groggery on the chapel premises, sailor's boarding house & brothel – & all this with the connivance of the priests. This they denied but it seems strange how it could have been done for so long a time & in defiance of the Chinese authorities without their knowledge. At Chusan one of the large islands off the coast near Ningpo. the priests got possession of many of the heathen temples & turned them into chapels. The means by wh they did this not appearing altogether fair & honorable, the chinese went to claim them back forcibly & in the affray committed some damage both on the temple & on some Roman Catholic graves. This was immediately referred to Consular authority & as French consuls always favor true friends to the Ch. heavy damages were laid & the Chinese authorities required to levy them from the people. Some of the Chinese Roman Catholics themselves were so offended by these proceedings that they left the service of the Bishop of the province who had been the chief actor in getting possession of the temples. Some of them came up here, but were strongly beset by the Romish priests & I think likely have returned to their allegiance. I cannot go into further detail of such facts, but you will see what information we have to rely upon in order to judge of Romanism in China. Of course our information is not very general nor very definite, yet a few

genral statements may be ventured as an approximation to the truth.
1st The great object of Romanism for the last 200 years has been to hold its own. This has not been an easy task when the country has been shut out from all ~~religious~~ European influence. Still the belief has descended from father to son - private chapels have been kept up in the houses of believers & in some cases whole towns & villages are said to be under their influence. It is genrally estimated that there are 60.000 * Roman catholics in this province. This is however one of their prominent posts. It was here that Xu Kwang Ke one of the greatest statesman of China was born & buried. He wrote several defences of the Roman Catholic religion & presented to the Emperor. As a fruit of his literary labors we have a translation of Euclid made with the assistance of Schaal. A 2d genral remark is that the Catholics are as unscrupulous here as elsewhere in the means they use for promoting their object. They pay no regard whatever to treaty regulations about confining themselves to the ports. Some of them go to Pekin & Tartary. Not long since a Bishop was here with the title of Bishop of Japan. He had never yet been there, but it was reported that some of the faithful were still living there & he was going to look after them. A worse feature of their unscrupulousness is the manner in wh they obtain possession of chapels & lots for building purposes. Property that was confiscated in the persecution they claim now with all the improvements ~~on them~~. In disputed claims among the chinese, they will often side with one party & by means of their influence having secured it to them, will take the greater part in pay. This is said to have been the mode of their proceding at Chusan. A 3d remark is that their converts genrally do not differ from the heathen around them. Indeed some of their forms are so like Budhism that the Romanists are said to consider it an invention of the devil to counterfeit the truth. But not only are the forms alike there is also the same want of instruction in divine things. They are toled more what they must do, than what they must believe. Hence their faith is a mere superstition resting in the outward form. This I suppose to be the case with most though should be glad to learn if opposition to idolatry among the heathen had led them to forsake it among themselves.

The 2d point of enquiry wh you make refers to objections made by the Chinese to the religion ~~of the Bible~~. Christianity is a thing so new in China that opposition to it has taken no definite form. In fact we sometimes feel disposed to complain because there is so little opposition & so few objections made. More opposition would show that the truth was taking effect. Another reason why we have so few objections is because the Chinese generally consider it a matter of politeness to assent to what you say whether it convince or not. added to this is a very frequent

* The Romish Bishop of this province puts the number of his christians as 72.000 calls them as 60.000

desire to represent the christian system as like some of their own. This is very naturally strengthened by the terms wh we have to use to represent Xtian ideas. The language has to be converted as well as the people. many missionaries also use the term for God wh the chinese apply to one their chief god. Whatever may be said in favor of this practice, it certainly has the tendency to confound our teachings with heathenism. Another reason why we have so little opposition is that the priests, who are the authorized defenders of false religions, have no authority & but little influence in the community. If we go into a temple & tell the crowd that the wooden & stone gods can neither see nor hear, nor talk & they will join in the laugh. occasionly you will meet with a man who says he does not worship the image but the being represented by it.

But to come to the objections sometimes urged. One of the most common ones is that our religion is a foreign one wh answers very well for us, but for themselves they prefer the religion of their ancestors. Another form of the same objection is that the fruits of our religion are not good. We preach Jesus they say, & bring Opium to destroy us. Of course we are obliged to utter our protest against Opium. We only wish we could do it more effectually. There are laws against it more stringent than those of Maine against ardent Spirits. but they are a dead letter & will be as long as foreigners can bring the drug with impunity. Another objection occasionly urged is that they can't see God. Show me Jesus said one man & I will believe on him. These are the usual variety of objections - none of them manifesting any knowledge of the Xtian system. In fact few among this people at all comprehend it. Some of them understand a few facts in regard to it but they are constantly misconceiving the doctrines. They compare Jesus to Confucius. They will allow he was a holy man & his doctrines good but they claim the same for the sage. If you speak of the miracles of Xt, they have strange & wonderful things to relate as performed by their deities. A vast valley of dry bones, is this our field of labor & the bones very dry. as yet we hear no noise we see no shaking. but the Lord has told us to Prophesy & he can cause them to live

July 8th I was interrupted in writing & on account of various duties & engagements have not been able to resume my pen till to day. I understood however that the vessel had not left yesterday so I hope that I shall not be too late for the present opportunity.

Besides the topics above alluded to on wh you requested information there is another suggested in your letter on wh I wished to make a few remarks. The opinion is sometimes entertained that the mere fact of a man being a missionary makes his spiritual joys greater & his trials & temptations less than those of most christians. Some seem to think that missionaries have a sort of exclusive claim to the promise of a hundred fold for leaving brethren & sisters, father & mother. Now though they have a claim upon this promise if done for His sake & the gospel, yet the leaving is far from being a local one. It is renouncing, forsaking, not allowing them to come in contradiction to higher duty, wh a man may do without crossing the sea. The fact is missionaries are men, alike exposed & ~~to a great extent~~, alike subject to human frailties & sins with other christians. A few biographies may keep up the idea of superior saintship, but it should be recollected that it is not attained merely by becoming a missionary, neither is it bestowed upon us by the great Head of the ch merely on account of that fact. Some persons who have sustained a good character at home have on missionary ground fallen into sin & come under condemnation of the adversary. I sometimes think he is more peculiarly malignant here where we are trying to destroy his old strongholds. But be this as it may, let me refer you to a few facts to show you that our situation is not one altogether removed from temptation. 1st We are removed from christian society except that wh is made by our own little circle. You may know something of the effect of this removal by noticing the condition of those who do not acknowledge the influence of christian principle. Sins wh would shut a man out of good society at home are committed unblushingly here. The Sabbath is disregarded. All restraint is thrown off & every man does that wh is right in his own eyes. 2d It is sometimes thought we have but few worldly cares to distract us. But in some stages of missionary work these are so great as to require the most of our time & attention. We have to turn carpenters & masons & make the plans & superintend the building of all our dwellings school houses & chapels. In fact all the secular business of missions, financial & otherwise wh devolve chiefly upon laymen at home, missionaries have to take care of themselves. 3d Controversies & disputes are as apt to arise here as at home. Some suppose that missionaries have no

much to do in preaching the gospel. That the most entire harmony prevails even among those of different denominations. But this is perhaps up to be expected than at home. We come here with widely different habits formed under different circumstances & perhaps of different nations. & our views are necessarily different. We have evidence of this in the controversy wh has always existed among missionaries in China, as to what is the proper term for God & more latterly it has assumed another form as to the proper principles of translation. These statements will be sufficient to show that missionaries are no peculiar race, who have got half-way to heaven by going half-way around the globe. My reasons for making these statements are that I wish to see, missionaries & their work represented correctly. I have seen some very well-meaning & well-informed people, apparently shocked on seeing missionaries in their field of labor & for no other reason than that they were men & women & were very much like other men & women at home. They expected to have found them in a cave or dungeon, a living on the ground floor like the heathen. and then only think of their having enough to eat & wear & their children healthy like children at home. Why they ought to have been all half-dead. That is the way to be a missionary. But my special reason for alluding to this subject, is that we have the same need of your sympathies & prayers for support & guidance & that we may be kept from evil, as other Christians at home. We may become worldly-minded, proud, indolent. We may teach false doctrines. We may fall into gross sin. We may shudder at the idea as I hope we do, but remember that our strength to resist comes not from our position but solely from Yt our Head.

With regard to our mission we are progressing but slowly. We hope to have mission residencies for 2 or 3 families & a chapel completed this year. Our direct missionary work is confined mostly to preaching & translating. Mr Culbertson is engaged in the latter work 3 or 4 hours of each day. We rent a Chinese shop at present for our preaching place. Sometimes only 4 or 5 comes in & sometimes 30 or 40. When there are only a few we make the service almost entirely conversational. In the winter I spent two afternoons in the week visiting temples & different places of resort distributing tracts & preaching. Such work wh requires exposure to the sun we are obliged to discontinue for 2 or 3 months in the year. The genral health of the mission good as well as that of the most of the other missionaries. Dr Burton of

the Baptist mission has been & still is very ill with brain fever brought on by exposure to the sun.

I suppose you generally expect to get a brief glance at general news although perhaps you may see the same things through other sources. There have been serious riots at Chinkiang on account of the salt monopoly but after the government had called about 1000 soldiers there nearly 300 of whom were killed besides a large number of officers, in an affray with the people, the rebellion died of itself. In Kwang se it is reported here that the whole province has been given up to the rebels. Whether they will remain satisfied with that, remains to be seen. It is currently reported here that the Governor of Kwang tung or Canton reported to the Emperor that he had seen two black stars (we should call them spots) in the sun. His majesty caused the ancient books to be searched & it was found that when this occurred before, 15 out of the 18 provinces were in great distress if not in rebellion. The conclusion drawn is that the same thing will occur this year. It is also said that the Emperor has once already confessed his sins to Heaven & Earth on account of the troubles he has experienced since coming to the throne & has invited his officers & friends to tell him, his faults that he may avert the threatened danger. With all these fears, there seems to be no real ground of alarm. We know not what unseen convulsions there may be in store, but outwardly the Empire appears as permanent as at any time for the last 200 years. Though the people know that their officers are guilty of all manner of injustice & oppression, yet they never think of laying any of it to the charge of the Emperor. Judging from the course events have hitherto taken in the East, the principal changes to be expected are those from without. When these shall take place we can only conjecture.

I hope, dear brother, to hear from you at least once each season. & shall be glad to answer your letters & give any information I may possess in regard to enquiries which you may make. I also hope it may be my privilege to welcome some of you as fellow laborers in this great harvest field. If you wish to labor where thousands are needed come to China. I often think if the Church only had laborers enough we should have a much wider field opened. God certainly will not be behindhand with his providences if we only follow them up. But wherever you labor may he make you faithful, diligent, zealous granting you above all other blessings the influences of his Holy Spirit.

Remain Yours truly J. K. Wright

Rec'd Nov. 4th 1852

Rev. A. H. Rigdon's letter